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TEAM MARYLAND HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE HONORING DEAMONTE DRIVER

Senators Cardin, Mikulski join MD Congressman to remind Marylanders about the importance of oral health

WASHINGTON – **U.S. Senators Benjamin L. Cardin** and **Barbara A Mikulski** today joined **Congressmen Elijah E. Cummings** and **John Sarbanes** (all D-MD) at a press conference honoring the fourth anniversary of the death of Deamonte Driver, the 12-year old Maryland boy who died after an untreated tooth infection spread to his brain.

Senators Cardin, Mikulski and Congressmen Cummings and Sarbanes were joined by Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene, Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D. and Maryland Dental Action Coalition Chair Beth Lowe.

Following the vote in the Senate against repeal of the ***Affordable Care Act*** last week, the Maryland legislators stressed the importance healthcare reform will play, particularly for those in underserved communities.

“Deamonte Driver’s passing four years ago was a national tragedy that served as a wake-up call reminding all of us about the link between oral health and overall health,” said **Senator Cardin**, who sponsored the amendment to the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization bill making dental care a guaranteed benefit within the program. “It also became the catalyst that led to passage of a guaranteed dental benefit in CHIP in 2009, and the oral health provisions guaranteeing dental coverage as an essential benefit for children in the Affordable Care Act.”

“This is a very emotional and poignant day for Marylanders. Deamonte’s death is a tragedy that should never have happened. That’s why I am going to keep fighting to make sure it never happens to another child in America,” **Senator Mikulski** said. “In the four years since Deamonte’s death, we’ve made Maryland one of the best states for oral health care for children. Maryland was one of eight states recognized for best practices in Medicaid dental coverage. And I was proud to put \$1.2 million in the federal checkbook last year for a statewide oral health education campaign.”

“Deamonte is a tragic story to me, one that brings tears to my eyes,” said **Congressman Cummings**. “Deamonte lived, like so many do, in the shadows of our society. His mother

needed a single dentist who would take Medicaid to perform an 80 dollar extraction. She could not find one, and her 12-year-old boy died. Deamonte's death is a blight on the history of a nation in which everyone is supposedly created equal. This young man could not control where he was born, and into what circumstances, nor could he control the fact that his mother could not find healthcare. It was for Deamonte, and families like his, that I insisted on legislation in the Affordable Care Act to improve pediatric dentistry for those in underserved communities."

"Deamonte Driver's death was tragic but his legacy doesn't have to be," said Congressman **Sarbanes**. "For the past four years, we have worked in Congress to expand coverage and access to dental health care for children so that no child should have to suffer without adequate dental care."

Some of the improvements in the new healthcare law include:

- \$30 million for **oral primary healthcare workforce** improvements;
- \$15 million for fifteen five-year demonstration grants for **alternative oral healthcare workforce providers to serve in rural and other underserved areas**;
- \$5 million for an **oral health public education campaign**;
- \$8 million for **dental caries disease management grants**;
- \$15 million for **school-based sealant programs**; and
- \$30 million to **strengthen oral health surveillance and infrastructure**.

In response to Deamonte's death, Maryland instituted a series of provocative dental reforms recommended by a Dental Action Committee convened by then DHMH Secretary, John Colmers that addressed all aspects of the services he did not receive.

The reforms recommended by the Dental Action Committee established a new roadmap that the Department and its partners throughout the state embarked upon to permanently and effectively address the dental access crisis that existed in Maryland.

Access to Medicaid dental services has increased in Maryland to 43.8% (CY 2009) from 32.9% (CY 2007) in just 2 years with many more dentists (400) participating in Medicaid.

"Since the death of Deamonte Driver, Maryland has made tremendous progress in meeting the dental needs of children," said DHMH Secretary Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D. However, our job is not done."

Maryland has become a leading state in the country to increase children's access to dental care and achieve a dental home. In 2010, Maryland was one of only six states in the country to receive a "A" grade from the Pew Charitable Trust for oral health for children.

The press conference took place at Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene headquarters.

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